# The Crucible

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller was born to middle-class parents in 1915 in New York City. Miller was unintellectual as a boy, but decided to become a writer and attended the University of Michigan to study journalism. There, he received awards for his playwriting. His first play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* opened in 1944. Miller had his first real success with *All My Sons* (1947). *Death of a Salesman* (1949) made Miller a star. *The Crucible* opened in 1952, and was considered an attack on the anti-Communist McCarthyism then raging in the United States. Miller himself was brought before Congress in 1956 and convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to cooperate. The conviction was eventually overturned.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Crucible* is a fictionalized account of the Salem Witch trials of 1692, in which 19 innocent men and women were killed by hanging and hundreds convicted before the panic subsided. Yet while *The Crucible* depicts one witch-hunt, it was written during another. In the 1950s, during the first years of the Cold War, a Senator named Joseph McCarthy rose to power by whipping the nation into a terror of Communists. McCarthy led the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which sought to find Communists in America. Those named as Communists were placed on "Blacklists" that prevented them from getting work. Eventually the fervor died down and McCarthy was censured, but not before the lives of hundreds of people, particularly those in entertainment industries, were destroyed.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In its depiction of Puritanism, *The Crucible* most resembles Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Both works show that not only is Puritanism harsh and strict, but that this harshness makes it blind, cruel, hypocritical, and destructive. Hawthorne was actually a descendant of the notorious Judge Hathorne from the witch trials. Hawthorne added the "w" to his name to distance himself from the judge.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Crucible*
- **When Written:** 1950-52
- **When Published:** 1953
- **Literary Period:** Realist Drama
- **Genre:** Tragic Drama
- **Setting:** Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, when it was a Puritan colony
- **Climax:** *The Crucible* has an odd structure, in which each of the four acts ends on a climax. Act I: the girls scream out the names of witches. Act II: Proctor vows he will confront Abigail. Act III: Proctor reveals his adultery with Abigail, and Elizabeth Proctor lies. Act IV: Proctor rips up his confession.
- **Antagonist:** Abigail Williams

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Real Salem Witch Trials.** In his depiction of the witch trials, Miller took many major departures from fact. For instance, John Proctor was nearly 60 and Abigail Williams only 11 at the time of the witch trials. Any affair between the two is highly unlikely, to say the least. Miller was always open about the liberties he took with history, saying that he was writing "a fictional story about an important theme."

**Some Like it Hot.** Arthur Miller was not a star the way writers are stars today. He was much, much bigger than that. After he wrote *Death of a Salesman*, he was a tremendous national sensation. In fact, he was such a big star that he married Marilyn Monroe. The couple married in 1956, and stayed together until 1961.

## PLOT SUMMARY

In the Puritan town of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692, the town minister, Reverend Parris, discovers his daughter Betty, niece Abigail, and other girls dancing in the forest with his slave Tituba. Betty faints in fright at being discovered, and will not wake. Rumors of witchcraft spread through the town and a crowd gathers at Parris's house while Parris, nervous about his reputation, questions Abigail about what the girls were doing in the forest. Abigail says they were just dancing, though it soon comes out that Tituba was trying to conjure dead spirits.

Parris runs off to calm the crowd, and a local farmer named John Proctor winds up alone with Abigail. While Abigail was a servant in the Proctor household, she and Proctor had an affair. Abigail tells Proctor there was no witchcraft, and insists Proctor still loves her. Proctor, guilt-ridden over the affair, tells her it's over. As the crowd downstairs begins to sing a hymn, Betty starts screaming and Parris, Thomas Putnam, Ann Putnam, Rebecca Nurse, and Giles Corey come running into the room. An argument about whether witchcraft led to Betty's condition soon transforms into an argument about other local political issues. Just then, Reverend Hale, a noted investigator of witchcraft, arrives, and Proctor, Rebecca Nurse, and Giles

Corey leave.

Under threat of punishment if she refuses to confess, Tituba breaks down and admits she communed with the devil. She begins to name other witches in the town. Abigail, seeing that she'll be punished unless she joins Tituba in naming names, leaps up and begins to name more witches. Betty wakes and joins in.

Eight days later, Proctor and his wife Elizabeth discuss the many people who have been charged with witchcraft by a court presided over by the deputy governor of the province. They learn from their servant Mary Warren, one of the girls accusing people in the town of witchcraft, that Elizabeth is herself accused. Elizabeth wants Proctor to expose Abigail as a fraud, but she suspects Proctor may still have feelings for the girl. As Proctor angrily denies it, Hale arrives to investigate the Proctors. He's soon followed by Giles Corey and Francis Nurse, whose wives have been accused of witchcraft and imprisoned. Moments later the authorities come and take away Elizabeth. Once they're alone, Proctor demands that Mary expose the other girls as frauds and promises to confront Abigail if he must.

Proctor brings Mary to court to expose the accusations as lies. The girls, led by Abigail, deny the charge. Proctor reveals his affair with Abigail to show that she's dishonest. To test Proctor's claim, Deputy Governor Danforth calls out Elizabeth, who Proctor says will never lie. But when asked if Proctor had an affair with Abigail, Elizabeth denies it to protect her husband's honor. Abigail and the other girls seize the moment to pretend Mary is attacking them with her spirit. Mary breaks under the strain and joins them, denouncing Proctor as an ally of the devil. Danforth orders Proctor's arrest. Hale, who now believes Proctor, denounces the actions of the court.

The witch trials cause anger and riots in nearby towns. A few days before Proctor and many others are scheduled to hang, Abigail steals money from Parris and vanishes. Parris and Hale try to get the people convicted of witchcraft to confess in order to save their lives, because Danforth refuses to stop or postpone the executions, saying it would not be fair to those already hanged. But Danforth does allow Elizabeth, who's pregnant and therefore safe from hanging, to talk to Proctor. After speaking with his wife, Proctor agrees to confess, but refuses to incriminate anyone other than himself. Once he signs his confession, he refuses to hand it over. His name is all he has left, he says, and he won't ruin it by signing lies. Danforth says that if Proctor is not honestly confessing, then he won't accept the confession. Proctor tears up the statement. Parris and Hale are horror-struck as Proctor goes to the gallows, but Elizabeth says he has gotten his "goodness" back.

# CHARACTERS

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

**John Proctor** – A farmer, and the husband of Elizabeth. Proctor had an affair with Abigail Williams while she worked as a servant in his house. A powerful man in both build and character, Proctor refuses to follow people he considers hypocrites, including Reverend Parris. Feared and resented by the many people in Salem he has made feel foolish, Proctor has a powerful sense of personal integrity. For this reason, his affair with Abigail makes him see himself as a hypocrite.

**Reverend Parris** – The minister of Salem, Betty's father, and Abigail's uncle. Tituba is his slave. As a minister, Parris delivers harsh fire and brimstone sermons that sometimes turn off his parishioners. As a father and master, he's inattentive and quick to anger. Parris's insecurity and obsessive concern with his reputation result from his near paranoid belief that someone is plotting to persecute him, steal his position, ruin his good name, or harm him in some other way.

**Reverend Hale** – A minister in the nearby Massachusetts town of Beverly, and an expert in identifying witchcraft. An intelligent man, Hale sees himself as a scientist and philosopher, a kind of physician of the soul. At the beginning of the play he's something of an innocent, taking for granted that the world is black and white and that he, with his expertise, can tell the difference between the two. By the end of the play his outlook has changed considerably. Unlike the other priests, his insistence on uncovering facts makes it impossible for him to overlook the evidence indicating that those condemned of witchcraft in Salem were innocent.

**Elizabeth Proctor** – The wife of John Proctor. She fires Abigail Williams as her servant when she discovers that the girl is having an affair with Proctor. Elizabeth is a good woman known for never telling a lie. She loves her husband deeply, but seems to have the sense that she doesn't deserve him, and therefore often responds coldly to him. His affair with Abigail has both shaken the trust she had in her husband and convinced her that she was right in her assumption that she didn't deserve him.

**Abigail Williams** – The 17-year-old niece of Reverend Parris. Marauding Native Americans killed Abigail's parents when Abigail was young. While a servant in John Proctor's household, Abigail briefly became John's lover before Elizabeth found out and fired her. Abigail is beautiful, intelligent, crafty, and vindictive. She's also a skillful liar. She is the leader of her group of girlfriends and is willing to do anything to protect herself.

**Thomas Putnam** – The husband of Ann Putnam, and one of the richest farmers and landowners in all of Salem. Putnam is a bitter man who feels that the citizens of Salem have not given him the respect that he and his family deserve. He seeks to gain respect and revenge by increasing his wealth, landholdings, and

influence however he can.

**Giles Corey** – A farmer who owns a farm near Salem, Giles is an old man and somewhat of a rascal, but also very brave and moral at heart. In his many years he's been involved in numerous court cases and lawsuits, and therefore knows the law inside and out. He is married to Martha Corey.

**Francis Nurse** – A wealthy farmer and landowner in Salem and the husband of Rebecca Nurse. Francis Nurse is generally considered by the Salem community to be a good man, but many people resent his recent rise to wealth. He's had arguments over land with Putnam that have risen even to the level of physical fights. Families related to Francis Nurse were involved in refusing to allow Putnam's wife's brother-in-law to become the minister of Salem, a slight that Putnam has not forgotten.

**Deputy Governor Danforth** – A Deputy governor of Massachusetts who comes to Salem to preside over the witch trials. Though he's more open-minded and intelligent than Judge Hathorne, Danforth believes completely in his ability to distinguish truth from fiction. He views those who disagree with him as suspect. In fact, he suspects that anyone who disagrees with him might be working "against God."

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Ann Putnam** – The wife of Thomas Putnam. Mrs. Putnam is as bitter as her husband, but for different reasons: just one of the many babies she has given birth to has survived past infancy.

**Rebecca Nurse** – The wife of the wealthy farmer Francis Nurse. Rebecca is a much beloved and admired figure in Salem for her religiousness and good sense. She has also served as the midwife at many births.

**Judge Hathorne** – An arrogant and unpleasant Salem judge who considers the Puritan government to be absolutely right and just. As a representative of that government, he believes in the perfection of his own wisdom and judgment.

**Mary Warren** – A teenage girl and a servant in the Proctor household who replaces Abigail Williams. She is a generally good and quiet girl. She fears wrongdoing, but she fears Abigail even more.

**Mercy Lewis** – A teenage girl and a servant in the Putnam household. She is Abigail's closest friend and confidant, and the second in command of the group of girls behind the trials.

**Betty Parris** – Reverend Parris's teenage daughter. In many ways she seems like a typical teenager rebelling against her overly protective father. A follower, she quickly falls in line with Abigail's plot.

**Tituba** – A slave of Reverend Parris, she is originally from Barbados. Tituba is terrified of Parris, who generally blames her for everything that goes wrong in the house. As a black female slave, she represents the lowest rung of Salem society.

**Mrs. Osburn** – One of the women Tituba first identifies as a witch. She served as the midwife for three of Mrs. Putnam's ill-fated deliveries.

**Susanna Walcott** – A girl in Salem, who works for the town doctor.

**Sarah Good** – An old woman and town drunk who often goes begging from door to door.

**Ezekiel Cheever** – A court clerk during the Salem Witch trials.

**Marshal Herrick** – Salem's town (police) marshal.

**Martha Corey** – The wife of Giles Corey. She never appears onstage.

# THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

## PURITANISM AND INDIVIDUALITY

Puritan society required that its members follow strict guidelines of social order. These rigid rules of conduct helped the Puritans endure the persecution they faced in Europe and, after they came to America, created a close-knit community able to withstand the harsh weather and Native American attacks common to New England in the 17th century. But communities that focus primarily on social order leave no room for personal freedom. Those who think or act independently are seen as a threat to the community: they must therefore be swiftly stopped or eliminated.

An excessively strict social order also provides no outlet for personal grievances. Over time, unvoiced resentments build up among individuals, primed to explode. The witch trials depicted in *The Crucible* can be considered an attack against individuality: those accused and convicted of witchcraft were mostly people who prioritized their private thoughts and integrity above the will of the community. The trials provided a legally sanctioned forum for the expression of anger and grievance. If your neighbor once sold you a pig that died soon after you bought it, and that neighbor stands accused of witchcraft, it seems only natural to bring up the dead pig as possible evidence. The trials also gave people like the Putnams the chance to voice their festering bitterness by accusing those whom they had quietly resented for years.

### HYSTERIA

In *The Crucible*, neighbors suddenly turn on each other and accuse people they've known for years of practicing witchcraft and devil-worship. The town of Salem falls into mass hysteria, a condition in which community-wide fear overwhelms logic and individual thought and ends up justifying its own existence. Fear feeds fear: in order to explain to itself why so many people are afraid, the community begins to believe that the fear must have legitimate origins.

In *The Crucible*, hysterical fear becomes an unconscious means of expressing the resentment and anger suppressed by strict Puritan society. Some citizens of Salem use the charge of witchcraft willfully and for personal gain, but most are genuinely overcome by the town's collective hysteria: they believe the devil is attacking Salem. And if the devil is attacking your town, then ensuring that your neighbor is punished for selling you a sick pig suddenly becomes a religious necessity, a righteous act that protects the God you love and proves that you're not a witch or a devil-worshipper. *The Crucible* shows how religious fervor fuels hysteria and leads to conditions that sacrifice justice and reason.

### THE DANGER OF IDEOLOGY

An ideology is a rigid set of beliefs that defines what an individual or community thinks. In the Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts, a government run by religious authorities, the dominant ideology held that the Puritans were a chosen people that the devil would do anything to destroy. Since religious men ran their government, the Puritans considered all government actions to be necessarily "good," or sanctioned by Heaven. This meant that any attempt to question, obstruct, or otherwise resist any of the government's actions, no matter how ludicrous, destructive, or ill-informed, was considered by the government and other Puritans to be an attempt to overthrow God.

Governments fueled by such rigid and absolute ideological convictions often fall into corruption and tyranny without even realizing it. In *The Crucible*, Deputy Governor Danforth and Judge Hathorne believe that they're emissaries of God, and therefore that everything they believe must be true and everything they do must be right. They never see a reason to reassess their thoughts and actions, which makes them easy targets for cynical and talented liars like Abigail Williams. Characters like Abigail recognize the court's narrow-minded worldview and manipulate it to their own selfish advantage



### REPUTATION AND INTEGRITY

Reputation is the way that other people perceive you. Integrity is the way you perceive yourself. Several characters in *The Crucible* face a tough decision: to protect their reputation or their integrity. Parris, Abigail, and others to protect their reputations. Rebecca Nurse and, eventually, John Proctor, choose to protect their integrity.

In rigid communities like Salem, a bad reputation can result in social or even physical punishment. *The Crucible* argues that those most concerned with reputation, like Parris, are dangerous to society: to protect themselves, they're willing to let others be harmed and fuel hysteria in the process. In contrast, *The Crucible* shows that those who favor integrity by admitting mistakes and refusing to lie just to save their own lives help defy hysteria. Willing to die for what they believe in, they put a stop to the baseless fear that feeds hysteria.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### THE CRUCIBLE

The play *The Crucible* is itself a symbol. Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* in the early 1950s, when intense American fears of Communism allowed Joseph McCarthy, a United States Senator from Wisconsin, to rise to national power through his Congressional investigations (called "witch-hunts" by McCarthy's opponents) of Communists in America. As in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, McCarthy and his followers created a hysterical fear among the population, and silence was considered an indication of guilt. Just as many non-witches confessed to committing witchcraft, many non-Communists confessed to being Communists and falsely named others as Communists in order to evade punishment. The entire play *The Crucible* can therefore be seen as a symbol of the hysterical anti-Communism of the early 1950s, though it should not be seen as *only* a symbol. The themes it defines and explores are timeless and applicable beyond the time and place in which they were written or set.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Crucible* published in 2003.

### Act 1 Quotes

There are wheels within wheels in this village, and fires within fires!

**Related Characters:** Ann Putnam (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 26

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Ann Putnam delivers these lines about Salem, she has already admitted to consulting Tituba about the possible role of witchcraft in the deaths of seven of the Putnam infants. Now, Mrs. Putnam's grief over her lost children explodes into hysteria as she panics that she may lose her last surviving child, Ruth.

On one level, the quotation is a reference to the Bible, and the prophet Ezekiel's rather terrifying vision of God in his chariot (Ezekiel describes wheels moving within other wheels, as Mrs. Putnam mentions here). Mrs. Putnam's quotation goes further than a simple allusion, however, as her claim about "wheels within wheels" in Salem suggests that she believes that there are complex, invisible powers at work, manipulating the fates of the villagers. This paranoid concept, early in the play, that things in Salem are not what they appear to be, foreshadows the ways in which Abigail will invent invisible attackers and sensations to convince the court of her victims' guilt.

At the same time, the way that Mrs. Putnam's need to place the blame for her tragic losses on someone else shows in general how deeply held resentments can burst into out-of-control anger and blame in general. And the way that blame mixes with the Puritan belief in witchcraft illustrates how Puritan towns like Salem could be particularly prone to eruptions of hysteria. Mrs. Putnam had quietly worried about witchcraft as the cause of her babies death before, but never said anything in public as she either never fully believed it or was embarrassed to say such things aloud. But now in this quote she is publicly saying it and convincing herself, as others will convince themselves, thus fueling the Salem Witch Trials.

> I have trouble enough without I come five mile to hear him preach only hellfire and bloody damnation. Take it to heart, Mr. Parris. There are many others who stay away from church these days because you hardly ever mention God any more.

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), Reverend Parris

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 27

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the villagers wait for the Reverend Hale to arrive and offer guidance on Betty Parris' illness, Mr. Putnam accuses John Proctor of failing to attend Reverend Parris' church services. Proctor, in turn, criticizes the Reverend. Proctor feels that the Reverend's focus on "hellfire and bloody damnation" turns the parishioners away from their personal relationships with God, perverting the proper role of the Church.

Here, John Proctor presents a striking individuality at odds with the strict, communal ideology of Salem's Puritanism. Proctor challenges the church, and, thus the community, since Puritan society was based around the church. Proctor will later say of Reverend Parris, "I see no light of God in that man": Proctor is separated from his community by his determination to define his faith on his own terms, instead of the church's.

Proctor's request of Reverend Parris to "take it to heart" suggests that Proctor genuinely does want to make Salem a stronger, more genuinely faithful community. Even though he responds to his discomfort with the way that Reverend Parris runs the church by staying away as much as he can, Proctor also refuses to be silent and freely shares his views on how to improve Salem and the Puritan church (a habit that will ultimately lead to his arrest and conviction).

> I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men! And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? I will not, I cannot! You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet!

**Related Characters:** Abigail Williams (speaker), John Proctor

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 22

**Explanation and Analysis**

Left alone with John Proctor and the supposedly ailing and unconscious Betty Parris, Abigail reminds Proctor of their past adulterous relationship, insisting that Proctor still loves her. Abigail is furious at Elizabeth Proctor, John's wife, who has ruined Abigail's reputation in the village. Proctor, meanwhile, feels that his personal integrity has been destroyed because of his affair with Abigail and betrayal of

Elizabeth, and he is dismissive of Abigail's pleas to return to her. Abigail places no such value on personal integrity; she is willing to make accusations of witchcraft in order to get out of trouble with Reverend Parris for dancing in the woods.

Abigail's speech also reveals that she has taken Proctor's opinions on Salem's hypocrisy and corruption to heart. From Proctor, Abigail has learned to recognize that the power of the Puritan church comes from its stifling of individual ideas that conflict with church doctrine. Abigail's understanding of the church's hypocrisy and paranoia will lead her to see how she can manipulate the church's fears in order to protect herself and to take revenge on the people she hates (like Elizabeth). In this speech, Abigail implies that the accusations of witchcraft she is going to make will be false, and are a calculated manipulation of the people of Salem.

Abigail fuses together her sexual awakening ("John Proctor that took me from my sleep") and her intellectual awakening ("and put knowledge in my heart"), using the Biblical language she is accustomed to (Adam and Eve's first sin was gaining "knowledge," and in the Bible sexual intercourse is often referred to as "knowing" one's spouse). Abigail shifts swiftly back and forth between the "light" of Proctor's love and the "light" of his teaching.

I want to open myself! . . . I want the light of God, I want the sweet love of Jesus! I danced for the Devil; I saw him, I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss His hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil!

**Related Characters:** Abigail Williams (speaker), Mrs. Osburn, Sarah Good

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 45

**Explanation and Analysis**

Out of fear that she will be hanged, Tituba confesses to making a compact with the Devil and says that she has seen Sarah Good and Goody Osburn with the Devil. In these closing moments of Act 1, Abigail leaps up and offers her own confession: she too has been ensnared by the Devil, but she now accuses a long list of villagers of witchcraft. Betty immediately follows Abigail's lead, offering her own confession and accusations.

This passage shows that Abigail understands the way that Reverend Hale and Reverend Parris will carry out their investigations: anyone suspected of dealing with the Devil can simply confess, make another accusation of witchcraft, and automatically be "cleansed." The community's hysteria and mob mentality ensure that Abigail and all her friends will be believed.

In this moment, Abigail chooses to protect her reputation over her integrity, preferring to send the women she names to their deaths rather than face the consequences of her misbehavior. Abigail's accusations here also introduce the ripple effect that her actions will have throughout the play: as soon as she begins to make these claims, Betty Parris and the other girls do, as well, and it becomes increasingly difficult for the innocent to argue against the mounting hysteria and the testimonies of the "victims" of witchcraft in Salem.

## Act 2 Quotes

I'll plead no more! I see now your spirit twists around the single error of my life, and I will never tear it free!

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), Elizabeth Proctor

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 59

**Explanation and Analysis**

Elizabeth Proctor remains convinced that Abigail Williams intends to become John's wife and have Elizabeth condemned as a witch. Elizabeth urges John to go to Abigail and make it clear that he has no interest in continuing their affair. Elizabeth questions John's hesitation, and, in this quote, John laments that Elizabeth obsesses over his past affair with Abigail and will not yet trust him or forgive him.

John considers his personal integrity stained forever by this "single error" and Elizabeth's suspicions and judgment merely increase his powerful guilt. Earning Elizabeth's forgiveness will become his central motivation in the play, and he is unable to forgive himself until she forgives him. John's fervent wish to win back Elizabeth's respect will lead him, ultimately, to give up his life rather than falsely plead guilty and, in doing so, commit a second sin.

I like it not that Mr. Parris should lay his hand upon my baby. I see no light of God in that man. I'll not conceal it.

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), Reverend Parris

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 62

**Explanation and Analysis**

Reverend Hale arrives at the Proctor home, as he has decided to visit each of the villagers who has been named in the trials. Hale questions John Proctor about the family's inconsistent attendance at church and his failure to have one of his three sons baptized. In John's response he explains that these lapses have nothing to do with an absence of personal faith but with his misgivings about the spiritual leadership of Reverend Parris.

The Puritan community believes that a minister is the instrument of God and, therefore, must be followed and recognized as sanctified. John stands up against this ideology, sure in his own faith and his own individual judgment of Reverend Parris. Unlike the rest of Salem, John is unafraid to share his opinions about the church ("I'll not conceal it") and to separate his own individual faith from the measures of observance prescribed by church leaders.

❝ I have seen too many frightful proofs in court—the Devil is alive in Salem, and we dare not quail to follow wherever the accusing finger points!

**Related Characters:** Reverend Hale (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 68

**Explanation and Analysis**

Francis Nurse arrives at the Proctor home, revealing that his wife, Rebecca Nurse, has been accused of witchcraft and charged with the murder of the Putnams' babies. Reverend Hale first reassures Francis that Rebecca will be found innocent but insists, reluctantly, that the court must take the accusations of witchcraft seriously.

Reverend Hale, a good but weak man, feels himself powerless to challenge the power of the court. Since the Puritan church controls the courts of law in Salem, Hale has no choice but to recognize the court's decisions as sanctified. Salem's hysteria overpowers even the most unblemished reputations, allowing for the accusations and arrests of previously revered Salem citizens, like Rebecca Nurse.

Hale's speech also reveals the fear that bolsters the Salem Witch Trials. His unwillingness to challenge Abigail's claims stems from actual terror that the Devil is present in Salem, a terror that the church leaders use to manipulate their followers into blind submission ("we dare not quail to follow").

Finally, these lines demonstrate how powerful Abigail has become and how skillfully she has understood, and taken advantage of, the people's weaknesses and fears. If the court is willing to believe any "accusing finger," Abigail finds herself free to point towards Rebecca Nurse or Elizabeth Proctor or anyone whom she means to harm.

❝ I'll tell you what's walking Salem—vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant's vengeance! I'll not give my wife to vengeance!

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), Elizabeth Proctor

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 73

**Explanation and Analysis**

Cheever, the court clerk, arrives at the Proctor home with a a warrant for Elizabeth's arrest. He explains that Elizabeth has been accused of sending her familiar spirit to stab Abigail with a needle. John Proctor protests, tearing the warrant, and demanding to know why no one suspects Abigail of lying: "Is the accuser always holy now?"

In this speech, John stands up to the Puritan court and church, laying bare the weakness and hypocrisy that have led to the warrant for Elizabeth's arrest. The citizens of Salem have always been rather close-minded and ideologically inflexible ("We are what we always were in Salem"), but now they have given into their paranoia, manipulated by Abigail and her band of "little crazy children." John insists that Abigail's accusations—and, therefore, the trials and warrants that result from them—are driven by personal vengeance, not truth.

The stain of vengeance is evident throughout the play. Most obviously, Abigail acts against those who have sullied her reputation or whom she hates, like Elizabeth. Earlier in this

scene, we learn that Walcott has accused Martha Corey of witchcraft because she refused to give him his money back for a pig that died from his poor care.

John's sorrow is also driven by his own guilt: the "vengeance" wrought by Abigail upon Elizabeth is the result of John's adulterous affair.

## Act 3 Quotes

❝ Do you take it upon yourself to determine what this court shall believe and what it shall set aside? . . . .This is the highest court of the supreme government of this province, do you know it?

**Related Characters:** Deputy Governor Danforth (speaker), Giles Corey

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 79

**Explanation and Analysis**

Act 3 opens with Giles Corey's interruption of the court proceedings. He wants Deputy Governor Danforth to know that he has evidence of his wife's innocence and that Putnam stands to benefit financially from the trials. In these rebukes of Corey's claims, Danforth asserts the court's power and derides Corey's attempts to provide evidence.

Here, in the dangerous and self-righteous Danforth's first appearance in the play, the corruption of the court is instantly apparent. Danforth refuses to listen to testimonies that contradict the inevitable guilty verdicts. He will ultimately distort and dismantle any arguments that the accusers should be suspected of giving false evidence of their own. Danforth believes that, as Deputy Governor of the state of Massachusetts, he has been selected by God to serve, and that his judgment is necessarily sanctified by heaven. Danforth stands as the ultimate representation of the Puritan ideology, which devalues any individual's beliefs in favor of placating (while also encouraging) the community's fears.

❝ You must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between. This is a sharp time, now, a precise time—we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God's grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it.

**Related Characters:** Deputy Governor Danforth (speaker), Francis Nurse

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 87

**Explanation and Analysis**

John Proctor and Francis Nurse have collected 91 signatures of landowners attesting to the good characters of their wives, as well as Martha Corey. Danforth decides that each of the landowners must be questioned, and Francis Nurse expresses despair, saying that he had promised the landowners that they would not be punished for signing the petition. In this speech, Danforth coolly reminds Nurse that the landowners will come to no harm if they have committed no sin.

Danforth speaks, ironically, of the great clarity with which the court now can view and judge the accused: all men and women are either good or evil, and the court can consider every person either with God or with the Devil. "The dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world" has now past, according to Danforth. Even in the midst of the moral murk of the trials, Danforth asserts that telling good and evil apart has never been clearer or easier.

Danforth believes that the Puritan church and its court have been endowed with the great power to judge all people as God himself might. Danforth insists that only people who fear the light of God's grace could question the court's actions. In doing so, he stifles the voices of anyone who would speak out against the court, threatening them with condemnation: again, "a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it."

❝ A man may think God sleeps, but God sees everything, I know it now. I beg you, sir, I beg you—see her what she is . . . She thinks to dance with me on my wife's grave! And well she might, for I thought of her softly. God help me, I lusted, and there is a promise in such sweat. But it is a whore's vengeance.

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), Elizabeth Proctor, Abigail Williams

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 102

**Explanation and Analysis**

John Proctor, horrified by witnessing Abigail shriek that

Mary's spirit is attacking her, publicly confesses to having slept with Abigail. He explains that Elizabeth dismissed Abigail because of the affair, and, in this speech, denounces Abigail, asserting that her hope is to have Elizabeth killed and to marry John. In confessing to his sin, John chooses to sacrifice his good reputation in an attempt to save his wife and the other innocents who stand accused.

The speech returns to John's language of "vengeance" in Act 2. Then, he claimed that the court's warrant for Elizabeth's arrest was borne out of vengeance, but now he endows that claim with scandalous specificity, insisting that Abigail's accusations are nothing but "a whore's vengeance." He finally carries out Elizabeth's wish that he reclaim his personal integrity and make it clear to Abigail that he has no intention of continuing their affair—but he acts too late. By now, Abigail has done her worst and the power lies in the hands of the court.

Throughout the speech, John leans heavily on religious language, seeking salvation and forgiveness through God's grace. John has felt ashamed to sin in the sight of God; he is wracked with a personal guilt that differs sharply from the hollow repentance that the court seeks from the villagers who stand accused.

❝ A fire, a fire is burning! I hear the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face! And it is my face, and yours, Danforth! For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I have quailed, and as you quail now when you know in all your black hearts that this be fraud—God damns our kind especially, and we will burn, we will burn together!

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), Deputy Governor Danforth

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 111

**Explanation and Analysis**

Danforth tells Mary Warren that she will be hanged unless she confesses so Mary turns on John Proctor, accusing him of having joined with the Devil. Proctor, prompted by Danforth to confess, instead declares that, "God is dead!" He then delivers this speech, in which he holds himself and all the men of the court accountable for giving into their fears, asserting that they will all burn in hell for these sins.

Proctor accuses himself of having failed to reveal the truth of Abigail's manipulations soon enough. He recognizes that Danforth and his followers know that Abigail is a fraud but that they give into hysteria, preferring to protect their reputations as interpreters of God's will rather than confess that they have erred in believing the girls' false testimonies.

Proctor, at last, locates the real "filthy face" of the Devil in Salem. It is found in all the villagers who fear to do the right thing and instead persecute and execute innocent individuals to preserve their power over the community. Danforth, of course, hears this speech as nothing but sacrilegious evidence that Proctor has indeed allied himself with the Devil.

Nowhere else in the play does the playwright's voice speak as strongly, ferociously condemning both the perpetrators of such self-serving, fear-mongering crimes and the bystanders who know the right thing to do but yet stand motionless.

## Act 4 Quotes

❝ It is mistaken law that leads you to sacrifice. Life, woman, life is God's most precious gift; no principle, however glorious, may justify the taking of it . . ..it may well be God damns a liar less than he that throws his life away for pride.

**Related Characters:** Reverend Hale (speaker), Elizabeth Proctor

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 122

**Explanation and Analysis**

John Proctor has been sentenced to hang unless he confesses to his alliance with the Devil. Reverend Hale, holding himself accountable for John's sentence, pleads with Elizabeth to urge John to confess and save his life.

Reverend Hale's words to Elizabeth reveal a broken minister who has come to doubt everything that he once understood about God's grace and righteousness. He tells Elizabeth that it is better for John to live than to uphold his spiritual integrity and go to the scaffold professing his true innocence. Desperate for John to live, Reverend Hale argues that it may even be a greater sin to die for "pride" than to lie in order to live.

Reverend Hale finally sees how blind adherence to the church has led the Puritans away from God: "Cleave to no faith when faith brings blood," he tells Elizabeth. Reverend Hale asks Elizabeth to do the one thing that she (and, ultimately, John) cannot do: make two wrongs into a right.

> I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs. Give them no tear! Tears pleasure them! Show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it!

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 133

**Explanation and Analysis**

John Proctor decides to tear up his confession, and so he will be hung for his failure to admit his union with the Devil. Before he is escorted to the gallows, he delivers this final speech, declaring that he is glad not to have given into pressures to conform with Puritan tyranny, and urging his wife to stand steadfast against the court: "Give them no tear!"

John remains aware of the wrongs he has committed: his adulterous affair with Abigail and his failure to expose Abigail's treachery earlier still plague him. The goodness that he perceives within himself is only a "shred." Still, in his final moments, John chooses to reclaim his integrity, standing in the light rather than giving into the shadowy evil of the Puritan court which would have allowed him to live. At last, Elizabeth can forgive him, and John can forgive himself.

> Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!

**Related Characters:** John Proctor (speaker), John Proctor

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 133

**Explanation and Analysis**

John Proctor gives a verbal confession and written confession but then grabs the paper back from Judge Danforth, refusing to have it made public. In this speech, he reveals that his confession is false, and he admits his tremendous guilt in going free when better souls, with greater integrity, have been killed for professing their innocence.

Proctor seeks to preserve some shred of integrity, ashamed to have given a false confession in order to save his life. He recognizes that by publicly confessing to an alliance with the Devil, he will feed Salem's fury, essentially supporting the senseless murders of his friends and neighbors by giving into the court's demands. The "soul" he has supposedly given to Danforth is his personal and spiritual integrity; in confessing, he has cast aside all of his cherished values.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### ACT 1

Betty Parris has fallen into a strange coma. Around her hover Reverend Parris, her father and the minister of the Massachusetts town of Salem, his 17-year-old niece Abigail Williams, and his slave Tituba. When Tituba asks if Betty will be all right, Parris yells at her to get out of the room.

*Parris's treatment of Tituba reveals his angry and selfish character. The incident also shows Tituba's powerlessness: she's entirely at her master's command.*

Susanna Walcott arrives with news that the town doctor can't figure out what's the matter and suggests Parris look for spiritual causes. Parris says it can't possibly be spiritual causes, though just to make sure he's asked Reverend Hale from the nearby town of Beverly to come investigate. As Susanna leaves, both Abigail and Parris caution her to keep quiet about what she's seen.

*Parris and Abigail are both trying to protect their reputations: Parris by stopping Susanna from talking about what she's seen in his house, and Abigail by warning Susanna not to mention what happened in the forest.*

Abigail tells Parris about rumors that witchcraft caused Betty's faint: a crowd has already gathered downstairs in Parris's house. Abigail suggests Parris publicly deny the rumors of witchcraft.

*The gathered crowd suggests both a uniform social order asserting itself and the beginnings of hysteria.*

Parris angrily asks if he should say he discovered his daughter and niece dancing "like heathen[s]" in the forest. Abigail admits they danced, but says that's all they did. Parris says that if the girls were conjuring spirits, he needs to know because his "enemies" will surely find out and ruin him. He says there's a group in the town that wants to drive him from his job as minister.

*Witchcraft isn't just a sin, it's a threat against Parris's job and reputation. He must control the rumors to save himself. The best way to control them is to deny them, or so he thinks at this point.*

Abigail insists there was no witchcraft, but Parris says he saw Tituba chanting over a cauldron. Abigail says that Tituba was just singing songs from Barbados, her homeland. Then Parris says he thinks he saw a naked body running away in the forest. Abigail swears no one was naked.

*Abigail holds back information, trying to make herself look as good and innocent as possible, although she's been caught doing something forbidden.*

Parris asks Abigail why Elizabeth Proctor dismissed her from her job as an assistant in the Proctor household six months earlier. He's heard rumors Elizabeth now rarely comes to church because she refuses to sit near Abigail. Parris also expresses concern that since Elizabeth dismissed Abigail, no other family has hired her. Abigail says Elizabeth dismissed her because she refused to act like a slave, and that other women haven't hired her for the same reason. She says her reputation in the town is spotless, and calls Elizabeth a cold woman and a gossiping liar.

*The charge of witchcraft, a religious sin, is here linked to other vague social transgressions. Parris and Abigail's strong concern about their reputations reveals how Salem's Puritan society required people to act according to its rigid social and religious rules. A ruined reputation could mean a ruined life in Salem.*

Mrs. Ann Putnam barges into the room. Parris yells that no one should enter, but when he sees who it is, he invites her in.

*The Putnams have influence in Salem. Parris craves their support.*



Mrs. Putnam tells Parris this event is a mark of hell on his house. She then asks how high Betty flew. Parris denies that anyone flew, but Mrs. Putnam says witnesses saw her fly.

*Rumors of witchcraft become belief in witchcraft: hysteria works by building upon irrational fear.*

Thomas Putnam enters and says it's a blessing that the "thing is out now." Putnam remarks that Betty's eyes are closed, while his daughter Ruth's eyes are open. Parris is shocked that other girls are also sick. Mrs. Putnam says they're *not* sick: they're being attacked by the devil. Putnam asks if it's true that Parris sent for Reverend Hale from Beverly. Parris says yes, but just as a precaution. Putnam is certain there's been witchcraft, but Parris begs him not to say it. If witchcraft is charged Parris fears he may lose his ministry.

*If there's no witchcraft, why do the girls faint? The play suggests that the comas result in part from the girls' subconscious understanding that illness could help protect them from punishment for breaking Salem's strict social rules.*

At her husband's insistence, Mrs. Putnam, who's had seven babies die in infancy, admits she sent Ruth to Tituba, who can conjure the dead, to find out why the babies died. Now that Ruth is afflicted too, Mrs. Putnam is certain that someone murdered her babies. Putnam says a witch must be hiding in Salem.

*Mrs. Putnam wants to have something to blame for the deaths of her babies. She wants it to be witchcraft, though she may not realize consciously that she does.*

Parris turns to Abigail, who admits Ruth and Tituba conjured spirits, but insists she wasn't involved.

*Abigail continues to lie to protect her reputation.*

Parris moans that he'll be run out of town. But Putnam says Parris won't be if he stands up and declares he's discovered witchcraft instead of letting others charge him with it.

*Like Mrs. Putnam, Putnam wants witchcraft to exist, though it isn't yet clear why.*

Mercy Lewis, the Putnam's servant, enters with word that Ruth has improved slightly. Putnam and Abigail convince Parris he should speak to the crowd gathered downstairs. Parris agrees to lead them in singing a psalm.

*Parris continues to believe that the best way to protect himself is to argue against the presence of witchcraft.*

When Mercy and Abigail are alone, Abigail tries desperately to wake Betty. At the same time she and Mercy try to get their stories straight: they all danced and Ruth and Tituba conjured spirits. Abigail tells Mercy that Parris saw her naked. Another girl, Mary Warren, runs in. She's terrified that the town will condemn them as witches. She says they have to confess because the penalty for witchcraft is hanging, but if they confess to just dancing, they'll only be whipped.

*Abigail is established as a liar, and Mary as frightened of Abigail. It's obvious that Mary Warren, at least, believes there wasn't any real witchcraft. Note that like Parris, Abigail is at the moment putting all her effort into denying witchcraft.*

Betty suddenly wakes and huddles against the wall, calling for her dead mother. Abigail tells Betty not to worry because she told Parris everything. But Betty says Abigail didn't tell that she drank blood as a charm to kill Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail smacks her across the face. She tells the other three girls that if they admit to anything more than dancing and Ruth and Tituba's conjuring, she'll kill them. Betty collapses back into her strange coma.

*Now it's revealed that Abigail really did push well beyond the strict religious laws of Salem in hopes of killing Elizabeth Proctor. Abigail is more than just a liar: she's capable of murder.*

John Proctor enters. He reprimands Mary, his servant, for leaving his house when he ordered her not to. Mary and Mercy Lewis leave.

*Proctor is portrayed as strong-willed and moral.*

When he's alone with Abigail, Proctor mentions the town's rumors of witchcraft. Abigail dismisses them, steps closer to Proctor, and says it's all nothing more than mischief. She says they were dancing and Betty just fainted. Proctor smiles, and says, "ah, you're wicked yet, aren't y'!" Abigail steps even closer and asks for a "soft word." She insists he still loves her. Proctor admits he has some feelings for her, but says the affair is over. Abigail, hurt and angry, insults Elizabeth, infuriating Proctor.

*Proctor's outward morality hides immoral thoughts and actions. Yet Proctor's self-hatred regarding his affair with Abigail actually proves his morality: he hates himself for being immoral. It's now clear that Abigail wanted to kill Elizabeth Proctor to have her teenage crush to herself.*

Downstairs, Parris and the crowd sing a psalm. Betty begins to wail. Parris and the Putnams run into the room. Mrs. Putnam says it's a sign of witchcraft: Betty can't bear to hear the Lord's name.

*Is it just a coincidence that Betty cries out when the hymn begins? Or has she been swayed by all the talk of witchcraft?*

Rebecca Nurse and Giles Corey enter. Parris implores Rebecca to go to Betty. She does, and Betty quiets down. Parris and the Putnams are astonished. Rebecca says this is just an example of children being children, and adds that she hopes Parris isn't really going to claim "loose spirits" were the cause.

*Rebecca Nurse speaks sensibly, but Parris and the Putnams resent her wisdom, perhaps as part of a general resentment of Rebecca's high standing in the community.*

A disagreement arises about whether Parris should have called Reverend Hale to come search Salem for spirits without first holding a meeting. The dispute erupts into an argument between Proctor, Putnam, Mrs. Putnam, Rebecca Nurse, and Parris about town politics and grievances. The argument covers everything from Putnam's meddling, to Mrs. Putnam's envy that none of Rebecca Nurse's children has died, to Proctor's dislike of Parris' fiery sermons, to Parris's belief that his salary is insufficient and that there's a faction against him in the town, to boundary disputes between Putnam, the Nurses, Proctor, and Corey.

*Witchcraft provides a forum for venting all of the resentments of Salem's close-knit oppressive society. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these resentments will impact all the characters' interactions as the hysteria about witchcraft grows.*

Reverend Hale enters carrying a stack of religious books about witchcraft. He seems eager to flex his authority. Proctor departs, but not before saying he's heard Hale is a sensible man and that he hopes he'll bring some sense to Salem. Hale examines Betty, but when Putnam mentions witchcraft Hale stops him. Hale says that the mark of the devil is clear. He asks them all to agree not to push the issue of witchcraft if he finds no evidence.

*Though a minister, Hale sees himself as a doctor building up a diagnosis based on facts. His focus on facts makes him less ideological than other ministers, less likely to impose his own beliefs on others or to need to protect his reputation.*

Putnam, Mrs. Putnam, and Parris tell Hale of the recent events. Hale and Rebecca are shocked Mrs. Putnam would send her child to commune with spirits, but Mrs. Putnam shouts that she won't allow Rebecca to judge her.

*Note the resentment between the Putnams and the Nurses. Salem society had previously kept their bitterness confined to silence.*

As Hale takes out a book about witchcraft and prepares to examine Betty further, Rebecca departs, clearly dismissing all this fuss as foolish. Giles interrupts. He asks Hale why his wife Martha reads books that she refuses to show him. Hale says they'll speak about it later, and gets to work.

*Proctor and Rebecca, two voices of reason, leave before the investigation begins. Those who can stop hysteria from growing often don't take it seriously until too late.*

Betty doesn't respond to Hale's question, so he turns to Abigail. She repeats that they were only dancing. When Parris mentions he saw them dancing around a kettle, Abigail says the kettle just held soup. Parris then says he thought he saw movement in the soup. Abigail says a frog jumped into the soup.

*Abigail continues to lie to save her reputation and her life, even as the evidence mounts against her.*

Troubled, Hale asks Abigail if she conjured the devil. Abigail says Tituba did. As Mrs. Putnam goes to get Tituba, Hale asks Abigail several questions: did she feel the devil's presence, did she drink from the kettle, did she sell herself to the devil? Abigail denies everything. As soon as Tituba enters, however, Abigail screams that Tituba made her do it, that Tituba made her drink blood.

*Abigail switches tactics once Hale makes it clear he believes there might have been witchcraft. Abigail gives him what he wants: she says there was witchcraft, and portrays herself as its innocent victim.*

Tituba responds that Abigail begged her to conjure. But Abigail says Tituba often "sends her spirit out" and makes Abigail laugh at prayer in church.

*Like Abigail did before, Tituba at first denies the presence of any witchcraft.*

Hale asks Tituba when she made a "compact with the devil." Tituba says she never has. Parris threatens to whip her to death unless she confesses. Putnam yells that she should be hanged. Tituba screams in terror that she didn't want to work for the devil, but he forced her. She says many witches exist in Salem. Hale and Parris ask if she's seen them. Tituba says yes. Putnam asks: was it Sarah Good, or maybe Mrs. Osburn? Tituba hesitates, but Hale tells Tituba not to fear: if she confesses whom she saw, she will be blessed.

*Tituba discovers that nobody wants to hear denials, just as Abigail realized earlier. The religious authorities interpret denials as lies, so Tituba gives them what they want: a confession. The men then encourage their shared delusion by planting the names of possible witches in Tituba's mind.*

Tituba identifies Sarah Good and Mrs. Osburn as other witches. Mrs. Putnam shouts that she knew it! Osburn was the midwife at the births of three of her dead babies.

*Mrs. Putnam finally gets what she wants, someone to blame: Mrs. Osburn.*

Suddenly Abigail stands up and shouts that she too wants to confess, to return to God. She starts chanting names of women she's seen with the devil. Betty wakes and begins to chant names too. Parris, Putnam, and Hale call for the town marshal as the girls scream out the names of witch after witch.

*After Tituba gave names, Abigail sees that she must do the same. Betty believes she saw witches because authority figures like Hale believe her when she says she did: a vicious cycle of hysteria.*

## ACT 2

Eight days later, John Proctor returns home late from planting the fields. He and Elizabeth talk about the coming crop as he eats the dinner she prepared for him. A sense of separation exists between them. Proctor asks his wife what's wrong. She says he was out so late she thought he might have gone into Salem. Proctor ignores the implications of her comment.

*Elizabeth thought Proctor went into town to see Abigail, but they've yet to discuss their feelings about his affair. This bottling up of resentment to preserve order mirrors what goes on every day in Salem's Puritan society.*

Elizabeth continues: Mary Warren is in town, as an official of the court. Proctor is astonished: what court? Elizabeth explains: judges have been sent up from Boston to try people for witchcraft. Fourteen people are in jail, and will be hanged unless they confess. Proctor can't believe it, but Elizabeth assures him it's true: Abigail leads the other girls in identifying witches. She urges a resistant Proctor to go to the court and tell the judges what Abigail told him: that it was mischief, not witchcraft.

*It's now clear that hysteria is gripping the town, extending even to the authorities. Proctor can no longer dismiss or ignore it. Yet Proctor still resists going to the court because he fears for his reputation.*

As Elizabeth continues to push Proctor to go to the judges, it comes out that he was alone with Abigail at Parris's house. Proctor had left that part out when he told Elizabeth the story earlier. Elizabeth is hurt and angry, while Proctor quickly becomes furious that his wife is still suspicious of him, even after he confessed his affair and ended it. He tells her to stop judging him. Elizabeth responds that she's not judging him: he's judging himself.

*Proctor's anger at himself over his affair with Abigail makes him mix up his integrity and his reputation. His sense of lost integrity, his anger at himself, makes him fear what others think about his reputation.*



Mary Warren enters. Proctor, already angry, threatens to whip her for disobeying his order not to go to town that day. Mary does not resist. Instead she goes to Elizabeth and gives her a poppet (a doll) that she sewed for her during the court proceedings. Elizabeth, though puzzled by this odd gift, accepts it. As Mary heads up to bed, Proctor asks if it's true that fourteen people are in jail. Mary says that now thirty-nine are in jail: Goody Osburn has been convicted and will hang, while Sarah Good confessed to witchcraft and thereby saved herself.

*Hysteria feeds itself and grows: now people have confessed to non-existent witchcraft! But Sarah Good's confession was the only way for her to save herself. (By the way: the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is designed to eliminate this sort of forced confession.)*

Proctor says that Sarah Good is just a "jabberer." But Mary says that Good "sent her spirit out" during the trial to try and choke the girls accusing her. Mary adds that she now realizes Good had tried to kill her in the past: whenever Good came begging and Mary turned her away, Good would mumble, and one time Mary felt extremely sick just afterwards. Mary adds that Judge Hathorne asked Sarah Good what she mumbled, and Sarah Good said she was reciting the Ten Commandments. But when Hathorne asked her to recite them, she didn't know even one.

*Hysteria isn't just a bunch of people lying: it's a blinding force that changes people's conceptions of reality. Mary Warren, who knows there was no witchcraft because she was in the woods that night, now believes witchcraft exists.*

Proctor considers this weak evidence and tells Mary not to go to town again. Mary refuses. When Proctor moves to whip her, Mary shouts that she saved Elizabeth's life: Elizabeth was accused of witchcraft, but Mary said she'd seen no sign of it in her time living with the Proctors, so the court dismissed the charge. Elizabeth asks who accused her, but Mary refuses to say and goes to bed.

*Just as witchcraft gives Mrs. Putnam an object to blame for her bad luck, it gives the formerly powerless Mary a new sense of strength. This feeling of strength, in turn, becomes a subconscious motive for her to believe that the witchcraft is real. .*

Proctor and Elizabeth know Abigail is behind the accusation. Elizabeth says Abigail wants to replace her as Proctor's wife. She tells him to go speak to her, to make it clear to Abigail that she'll never take Elizabeth's place. Proctor agrees to go, but is still angry that his wife doesn't trust him.

*Though Proctor can sense the mounting hysteria and knows that it's costing innocent people their lives, he's still most concerned about protecting his reputation.*

Suddenly Hale appears at the door, startling both Elizabeth and Proctor. Hale says that without the court's authority he's visiting each of the families "somewhat mentioned" in the trial to try to get a sense of them. He's just come from Rebecca Nurse's house. Proctor and Elizabeth are shocked. Rebecca Nurse is well known as the most religious person in Salem. Hale says the devil can tempt anyone, but nonetheless says he's certain Rebecca won't be charged.

*The first sign of Hale's integrity: he's uncomfortable with the trials. Unlike the court, which demands confessions on pain of death and then uses those false confessions to condemn innocent victims, Hale searches for actual evidence.*

Hale asks some questions about the "Christian character" of the house. He asks why the Proctors don't often go to church, and why only two of their three sons are baptized. Proctor explains he doesn't see the "light of God" in Parris. Hale says that such a thing is not for Proctor to decide: Parris is an ordained minister, therefore he has the "light of God." Hale also asks Proctor to recite the ten commandments. Proctor gets nine of ten, forgetting the one against adultery. The missed commandment troubles Hale, and he gets up to go.

*Puritan society denies the individual any right to make his or her own judgments. The Puritans think they have God on their side, and therefore cannot make mistakes. If a man has been ordained as a minister, then he must be good and wise. And if someone disagrees with that assessment, then he or she must be against God.*

Just as Hale is about to leave, Elizabeth persuades Proctor to speak up about Abigail. The news shakes Hale, who points out that many have confessed. Proctor counters by pointing out that they've confessed to save themselves from certain death. This realization has troubled Hale too, but he's avoided facing it until now.

*Proctor describes the vicious cycle created by ideological power. That Hale perceived this problem and overlooked it shows the Puritan authorities' inability to question themselves.*

Giles Corey and Francis Nurse appear in Proctor's doorway with the news that their wives, Martha and Rebecca, have been charged and imprisoned. Rebecca was charged with the murder of Mrs. Putnam's babies.

*The hysteria provide a forum for expression of suppressed grievances. The Putnams dislike the Nurses, so Rebecca Nurse is charged.*

Though troubled, Hale defends the court and says it will certainly send Rebecca home. Yet Hale has no answer when Corey says his wife was charged by a man named Walcott as retribution for once buying a pig from her that soon died.

*Hale thinks the Puritan court is blessed by God, and therefore believes that it will make the right decision. But his doubts have begun to show.*

Ezekiel Cheever and Marshal Herrick appear at the Proctors' door with an arrest warrant for Elizabeth. Cheever also asks Elizabeth to hand over any poppets (dolls) in the house. Elizabeth says she's had no poppets since she was a little girl, but Cheever notices the poppet Mary gave her. As Elizabeth goes to get Mary to explain, Cheever discovers a needle stuck in the poppet's belly—just that night Abigail fell screaming to the floor, and a needle was discovered stuck into her skin. Abigail said Elizabeth's spirit pushed in the needle. Mary tells Cheever she sewed the poppet and stored the needle in it. Cheever is unconvinced.

*The court, like Hale, believes itself to be blessed by God and that its judgments must therefore, by definition, be correct and just! The court therefore has no need for evidence. Mary's story completely discredits Abigail's claim that Elizabeth used witchcraft against her, but Cheever, as an officer of the court, remains convinced of Elizabeth's guilt.*

Proctor angrily rips up the warrant and orders Cheever and Herrick to leave his house, but Herrick and Cheever have nine men outside and take Elizabeth.

*Proctor takes a stand against the oppressive society that issued the warrant.*

Hale assures Proctor that the court will recognize Elizabeth's innocence, and promises that he will testify in her favor. He insists, however, that recent events in Salem must have some basis in fact. Hale leaves. Corey and Nurse soon follow.

*Hale's circular logic: the court's arrival in Salem is God's will and therefore must be justified. He can't fathom that the court's been deceived or misled.*

When they're alone, Proctor tells Mary she will testify against Abigail in court tomorrow. Mary says that Abigail will charge Proctor with lechery (excessive and indulgent sexual behavior) if he tries to reveal her lies. Proctor says only that then he and Abigail will "slide into their pit together." Terrified, Mary sobs that she can't testify.

*Proctor stops trying to protect his reputation. He decides to tell the court the truth. But Mary's terror, indicates that her fear may be stronger than her integrity, foreshadowing disaster.*

## ACT 3

Offstage, Judge Hathorne and Deputy Governor Danforth question Martha Corey. Giles Corey suddenly shouts that he has evidence that Thomas Putnam is using the trials to get more land. Corey is dragged from the courtroom (and onto the stage), followed by Francis Nurse, Hale, Parris, Hathorne, and Danforth. Hathorne and Danforth are furious that Corey would disrupt and try to influence the court.

*The court doesn't want evidence: it's already decided that witchcraft exists in Salem. The court, of course, failed to realize it forced false confessions by threatening to hang innocent people unless they confessed.*

Francis Nurse steps forward. Danforth says that he's only heard good things about Nurse's character and is amazed to see him in such an "uproar." Hathorne wants to arrest them all for contempt of court.

*Since the judges view themselves as allied with God and therefore always right, they can't accept or even comprehend anyone disagreeing with them.*

Nurse says they have proof the girls are frauds. Proctor and Mary Warren come forward. Parris tells Danforth that Proctor causes "mischief," while Hale begs Danforth to hear the evidence.

*Parris supports the court and gives into the hysteria to protect his reputation. Like Abigail, he's reversed his denials of witchcraft.*

Proctor tells Danforth that Mary is prepared to testify she never saw any spirits. Parris shouts that Proctor has come to overthrow the court, but Danforth silences him. Terrified and barely able to speak, Mary steps forward and says that the girls were only pretending to see spirits.

*Danforth is a more open-minded judge than Hathorne, slightly more willing to accept the possibility he could be wrong.*



Danforth, shocked, considers whether to accept this testimony in court. Proctor assures him his evidence is valid, but Ezekiel Cheever mentions that Proctor earlier ripped up the court's warrant, and Parris adds that Proctor seldom comes to church. Hale argues that such evidence hardly justifies considering Proctor a threat to the court.

*In a society built on social order, any deviation implies that you're against that order. No one can tell if you're religious, so they judge you by whether you seem religious. That's why reputation is so important in Salem.*

After a brief conference with Hathorne, Danforth informs Proctor that Elizabeth is pregnant, and therefore can't be hanged. He asks if Proctor will now let the proceedings go on. Proctor replies that he can't stand by: many of the condemned are his friends.

*Danforth tests Proctor's motives and Proctor proves his integrity by refusing to be satisfied with the protection of just his wife.*



Danforth agrees to hear the evidence. First, Proctor shows him a petition signed by 91 landowners declaring their good opinions of Elizabeth, Rebecca Nurse, and Martha Corey.

*The accusations attack people's reputations. Proctor tries to combat the attacks with proof of good reputations.*



Parris declares this an attack on the court. Hale questions why all attempts at defense are called attacks on the court.

*Hale begins to perceive the court's ideological blindness.*

Danforth decides the landowners must be questioned, which infuriates Nurse, who had promised them they would not be implicated. But Danforth says the people will not be harmed if innocent, and that everyone must be either with the court or against it.

*Since Danforth believes the court is always just, he cannot comprehend that it could be unfair. He considers fear of the court an indication of guilt.*

Next, Corey provides a deposition that quotes a witness who heard Thomas Putnam say he had his daughter charge a man with witchcraft in order to get his land. Danforth asks for the witness's name, but Corey refuses to give the name, for fear the man will be treated like the signers of the petition. Hale observes that there's a great fear of the court in Salem. But Danforth says this fear is evidence of a plot against Christianity in Salem, and has Corey arrested for contempt of court.

*Abigail and Putnam are The Crucible's two main villains. Hysteria makes the townspeople actually believe and fear witchcraft. But Abigail and Putnam manipulate that hysteria and the blindness of the court for their own ends.*

Proctor brings Mary forward. Hale says this argument is so important Danforth should let a lawyer present it to him. Danforth takes this as an insult to his ability to administer justice, and says that lawyers are unnecessary in cases where the only evidence is the testimony of the victims.

*Danforth here points out why the entire trial should be considered suspect—all the evidence is hearsay. Yet he thinks that because he's a Puritan Deputy Governor, he'll be able to perceive the truth.*

Danforth questions Mary. She's frightened, but tells Danforth that the other girls are lying. The girls are brought out to face Mary. Abigail denies the charge, but Proctor says Abigail has often laughed at prayer, and that Abigail and the other girls frequently danced in the woods. Parris is forced to admit he saw them dancing. Danforth had not heard this before, and begins to doubt.

*Proctor combats Abigail's attacks on other people's reputations by attacking her reputation. To protect his own reputation, Parris had kept the girls' dancing from Danforth.*

Hathorne comes up with an idea: if Mary was pretending to see spirits and faint during the trial, she could do the same now. But Mary can't. She explains: before, when she was surrounded by screaming girls and judges who seemed to believe in the spirits, she thought she actually saw spirits, and so could faint. Now she realizes she never saw them, and can't faint.

*Hysteria changes people's perception of reality. Mary wasn't lying before. When she said she saw spirits, she really thought she did because of the hysterical reactions of the people around her.*

Danforth seems to believe Mary and turns back to question Abigail, but Abigail suddenly shudders and claims to feel a cold wind. The other girls follow suit. They say Mary is sending her spirit to attack them. Furious, Proctor calls Abigail a whore. Proctor admits his affair with Abigail and says Elizabeth dismissed her because of it. Abigail denies it, but Proctor says he would not soil his own honor for no reason.

*Proctor sacrifices his reputation to prove that Abigail is lying. In the process, he regains his integrity: he tells the truth to try to help the innocent…*

Danforth sends for Elizabeth, whom Proctor says will never lie. While they wait, Danforth instructs everyone to remain absolutely still and silent and to make no signs of any sort. When Elizabeth enters, Danforth asks her whether Abigail and Proctor had an affair. Elizabeth hesitates, agonizing, then says no. As she's being led away, Proctor shouts out that he confessed. Elizabeth cries out in despair.

*...but Elizabeth doesn't know it was Proctor who confessed his adultery. She dooms both Proctor and the other innocent people by trying to protect Proctor's reputation rather than following her own natural instinct to preserve integrity.*



Hale says he believes Proctor, and that Elizabeth was just trying to protect his reputation, but Danforth will not hear it.

*Hale focuses on evidence and logic, but Danforth is no longer interested.*

Abigail screams again that Mary's spirit is attacking her. The girls start repeating whatever Mary says. Mary begs them to stop. Danforth threatens Mary that she'll hang unless she confesses. Mary runs to Abigail and says that Proctor is allied with the devil.

*The vicious cycle of forced confession gets Mary to turn against Proctor. Danforth dupes himself.*

Danforth demands that Proctor confess his allegiance to Hell. In response, Proctor says God is dead. Proctor then condemns himself as a devil, because he resisted fighting against what he knew to be false. He also calls Danforth a devil for allowing a fraud to be perpetrated. Danforth orders Proctor arrested. Hale denounces the court.

*Saying God is dead is the ultimate act of defiance against Puritan society. Danforth, blinded by absolute faith, thinks Proctor is just confirming his alliance with the devil. Hale, focused on evidence rather than ideology, knows better.*

## ACT 4

In a cell in the Salem prison a few months later, Sarah Good and Tituba think that the devil has come to take them to Barbados. But it's just Marshal Herrick, come to move them to a different cell.

*The hysteria has so overwhelmed Tituba and Sarah Good that they now believe their false confessions were real.*

Hathorne and Danforth enter. They wonder where Parris is and are troubled to learn from Herrick that he's with Hale, visiting those condemned to hang that morning, including Proctor and Rebecca Nurse.

*The judges' nervousness suggests the trials have made them uneasy: they sense their own blindness even if they can't admit it.*

Parris enters. To Danforth and Hathorne's questions about Hale, he answers that Hale has returned to try to convince those convicted of witchcraft to confess their crimes and save their lives. Danforth is surprised and pleased.

*Danforth thinks Hale has seen the error of his ways. He remains blind, unaware of Hale's actual intentions.*

After a moment's indecision, Parris reveals that Abigail robbed him of thirty-one pounds and then ran off with Mercy Lewis. He thinks they left after hearing about a revolt against the witch trials in the nearby town of Andover. Parris fears a similar riot in Salem now that people with social influence, like Rebecca and Proctor, are scheduled to hang. He begs to postpone the hangings.

*Finally, here is some proof that Abigail is a liar. In the courts eyes, this proof should bring up the possibility that all of Abigail's accusations were lies. In addition, the events in Andover show that the hysteria is waning. Could the injustice be overturned?*

Danforth refuses to postpone the executions. He does say, however, that he's willing to work until dawn to convince one of the convicted to confess, since a confession would make those who don't confess look like liars.

*No! Because Danforth believes his decisions reflect God's will, he can't change them. His rigid ideology makes him vulnerable to hysteria.*

Danforth's position doesn't satisfy Parris. He's received threats regarding his part in the trials and fears for his safety.

*As usual, Parris cares most about his own well-being.*



Hale enters, demanding pardons for the convicted. Danforth says 12 others have already been hanged for the same charge; pardons for the remaining convicts would therefore be unjust and crack the voice of God's law with "whimpering." Hale says a week's postponement would seem like mercy to the public, not weakness. Danforth doesn't listen.

*Danforth won't postpone the hangings because he won't allow himself, his government, or his God, to look weak. Ideology and reputation are more important to him than standing up to hysteria or saving innocent lives.*

Danforth does wonder, however, if they might be able to get Proctor to confess, since Elizabeth is now well along in her pregnancy. As Marshal Herrick goes to get Elizabeth, Danforth asks Hale why he returned to Salem. Hale replies bitterly that he came to convince Christians to lie and confess to crimes they did not commit in order to save their lives.

*Having lost faith in the church after seeing innocents condemned, Hale advises people to lie to save their own lives. In other words, he's advising people to sacrifice their integrity, by lying, to save themselves.*



Elizabeth enters. Hale tells her he will consider himself Proctor's murderer if Proctor is hanged. Hale begs Elizabeth to convince Proctor to lie, to give a false confession, in order to save himself. He says that life is God's great gift, and no belief or religion should be followed if it harms life. Danforth and Hathorne disagree. Hale shouts that the confession must be a lie since Proctor is innocent. Elizabeth agrees to speak with Proctor.

*Hale knows his advice goes against his religion. He's become so embittered by the blindness of Salem's religious authorities that his only choice is to defy them.*



Proctor is brought from his cell and the others leave so he can spend some time alone with Elizabeth. She tells him that hundreds have confessed, though Rebecca has not. She also adds that Corey refused to speak at all, in accordance with a legal loophole that ensured his farm would pass to his sons if he remained silent. Corey died while being pressed—stone after stone was laid on him to make him speak, but all he said was, "More weight."

*Lying is a sin. So Rebecca and Corey protect their integrity and their souls by refusing to confess. In its ideological blindness and insistence on social control, the government unknowingly forced people to act against their religion and damn their souls to save their lives.*

Proctor asks what Elizabeth would think if he confessed. Unlike Rebecca and Martha Corey, who refuse to lie and damn themselves, Proctor considers himself a liar already because of his affair with Abigail. So what's one more lie to save his life? Elizabeth says she can't judge him. She says that regardless of what he does, he'll be a good man. She adds that she has sins of her own: her coldness drove him to adultery. She tells Proctor to forgive himself.

*Elizabeth tells Proctor that only he can decide whether to sacrifice his integrity to repair his reputation and save his life. At the same time, she shows her own integrity by apologizing for driving Proctor away from her.*



Proctor decides to confess, though he knows he shouldn't. When they learn the news, Danforth, Hathorne, and Parris are overjoyed. They ask Ezekiel Cheever to write down Proctor's confession. Proctor asks why it must be written down. To post on the church door, they tell him. They ask Proctor if he's seen the devil. He says yes.

*Proctor sacrifices his integrity to save his life. The judges' joyful reaction shows they know he's innocent, but must condemn him to maintain their own reputations and make their blindness seem like wisdom.*

They bring in Rebecca in hopes that Proctor's confession will sway her. She says a confession would be a lie, and prays for Proctor's soul.

*Unlike Proctor, Rebecca chooses integrity over life.*

Danforth asks Proctor if he's seen Rebecca with the devil. Proctor says he hasn't. Danforth then asks if he's seen anyone with the devil. Proctor again says no. Hale and Parris convince Danforth to accept Proctor's confession anyway. Under pressure from Danforth, Proctor signs the confession. Yet when Danforth reaches for the confession, Proctor grabs it and refuses to hand it over.

*Proctor sacrifices his integrity to save himself, but he can't sacrifice the good name of others to save his own life. He has too much integrity to harm others for his own benefit.*



Danforth says the village must have proof. Proctor shouts that God has the proof, and that's enough. When Danforth persists, Proctor shouts that he cannot bear to sign his name to lies, or through his confession to soil the good names of his friends who refused to lie in order to save themselves.

*If God knows all, why should he need a signed confession? Danforth doesn't care about Proctor's soul: he just wants to protect his and his government's reputation.*

Danforth says if the confession is a lie, then it is no confession at all. Proctor rips the confession to pieces. Danforth orders Herrick to take Proctor to the gallows. Parris and Hale beg Elizabeth to speak to Proctor. But she says Proctor has his goodness back now, and refuses.

*Proctor's choice (integrity) affirms his goodness and reveals the selfish corruption of the ideological forces that condemn him. His death ends Salem's hysteria.*

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